Virginia Uribe Award for Creative Leadership in Human Rights

Putting His Fortune to Good Work

Tim Gill

After graduating from the University of Colorado, Tim Gill leveraged a $2,000 loan from his parents to found Quark, Inc., a company that revolutionized the desktop publishing industry through innovative and affordable page-layout software.

In 1992 Tim Gill, the entrepreneur, took on a new challenge. He became a philanthropist. Colorado voters had passed Amendment 2 (later overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court), which altered the state constitution to prohibit laws that protect gays and lesbians. Tim Gill responded by establishing the Gill Foundation—the nation’s first major foundation with the mission of securing equal opportunity for all Americans, regardless of sexual orientation or gender expression. As of 2012, the Foundation had invested over $243 million in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) equality in Colorado and across the nation.

In 2004, the Gill Foundation broadened its focus outside of Colorado on issues such as marriage equality, nondiscrimination, and safe schools. In fact, a Gill Foundation grant enabled NEA to develop its popular Bullying Prevention Kit for educators, which can be downloaded from www.nea.org/bullyfree.

Tim Gill didn’t stop there, however. Realizing that philanthropic work, alone, would not generate the kind of social change that was needed, he assembled a bipartisan team of political consultants to develop new political strategies to win in the states. Starting in Colorado, Tim Gill quietly targeted anti-gay incumbents in the 2004 election, and in no small part due to his efforts, both chambers of the Colorado legislature changed hands for the first time in 20 years. Energized by this success, Tim Gill created the Gill Action Fund to engage LGBT donors in state and local elections, targeting, with considerable success, anti-gay candidates.

His state-based strategies have been credited as one of the key factors in reshaping the political landscape in favor of LGBT equality and reversing the LGBT movement’s fortunes on marriage equality. While staying out of the limelight himself, Tim Gill is making a huge difference.